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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of heuristically based assignments and tests on adolescents' written responses to literature. In order to examine both tests and instruction, two separate but related experiments were conducted. Experiment 1 investigated whether the inclusion of guided prewriting on essay tests for two poems and two short stories would result in higher quality written responses than tests that did not include prewriting. Experiment 2 explored the effects of a series of five heuristically based lessons on the posttest essay scores on two poems and two short stories. Approximately 100 11th and 12th graders participated in each experiment. Analyses of the data indicated a significant treatment effect on one of the four test measures in Experiment 1, with students who received the experimental test format performing significantly better than students who received the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) format test. There were no significant effects for the instructional treatment in experiment 2. Reading ability and genre had significant effects on the quality of students' written responses to literature in both experiments, with higher ability students receiving significantly superior mean scores and all students performing better on tests for short stories than on tests for poems. Implications for teaching and further research into longitudinal training in heuristic procedures are discussed. A seven-page bibliography, a sample NAEP test, a sample experimental test, and a sample lesson follow the study. (Author/JAZ)

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A Comparison of Guided Assignments and NAEP Format Tests on Adolescent Response to Literature

Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association
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A Comparison of Guided Assignments and NAEP Format Tests

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of heuristically based assignments and tests on adolescents' written response to literature. In order to examine both tests and instruction, two separate but related experiments were conducted. Specifically, Experiment 1 investigates whether the inclusion of guided prewriting on essay tests for two poems and two short stories would result in higher quality written responses than tests that did not include prewriting. Experiment 2 explored the effects of a series of five heuristically based lessons on the posttest essay scores on two poems and two short stories. Approximately 100 eleventh and twelfth graders participated in each experiment.

Analyses of the data indicated a significant treatment effect on one of the four test measures in Experiment 1 with students who received the experimental test format performing significantly better than students who received the NAEP format test. There were no significant effects for the instructional treatment in Experiment 2.

Reading ability and genre had significant effects on the quality of students' written responses to literature in both experiments, with higher ability students receiving significantly superior mean scores and all students performing better on tests for short stories than on tests for poems. Implications for teaching and further research into longitudinal training in heuristic procedures are discussed.

A Comparison of Guided Assignments and NAEP Format Tests
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Introduction

The 1980 National Assessment of Educational Progress Literature Assessment (Education Commission of the States, 1981) presented discouraging news to teachers of literature. The reported results of the assessment revealed that students at all grade levels do not seem to possess the interpretive skills required to respond critically to literature. Students were, on the whole, unable to compose logically developed essay interpretations of short literary texts. Students had particular difficulty explaining their inferences about character traits or their feelings about a particular literary work. Because the students often failed to cite specific evidence from the text to support their inferences, the assessment investigators judged students' responses to be "fragmentary, superficial, and cryptic" because few students "showed evidence of having or using a systematic approach to the analytic tasks" (p. 23; Education Commission of the States, 1981). In fact, the investigators concluded that only 5% to 10% of all 17-year-olds tested showed strong analytic skills. In addition, the investigators found that the 17-year-olds' performance on reading, writing, and responding tasks had declined dramatically since the 1971 Assessment. The investigators speculated that the poor performance might be attributed to the lack of instruction on explaining and substantiating inferences.

These findings were echoed in the 1981 International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Assessment of Reading and Literature (Purves, 1981). While this cross-national comparison found that by international standards, United States' students performed relatively well on tests of reading comprehension, the investigators found that many American students perform rather

poorly on open-ended essay response tests. As the NAEP investigators did, the researchers in this study ascribed students' difficulties with interpretive tasks to lack of "opportunities to learn" in their classrooms, especially with regard to low-achieving students: "There would seem to be little in the classroom to stimulate these students to read more and to read more critically. The focus appears to be on decoding and 'busywork'" (Purves, 1981; p. 105).

Both the NAEP and the IEA investigations suggest that American secondary students lack the interpretive heuristics necessary for thoughtful, analytic essay response to literature. This deficiency implies the need for research on instructional strategies designed to improve the quality of secondary students' essay responses to literature.

Test Format

Despite the publicity afforded to the results of the national assessment, there has been little critical analysis of the NAEP assessment instruments. One factor influencing the quality of the student responses may have been the nature of the assignments themselves. While the NAEP investigators charged that 17-year-olds lack the heuristic skills necessary to formulate a satisfactory written response to literature, it may have been the case that the task directions themselves did not foster responses representing students' abilities to employ certain heuristic skills. Given the tasks of supporting inferences about feelings and character traits with evidence from the texts, the writing tasks upon which the evaluations were based may not have provided students with enough specific guidance for deriving information from a text in order to explain their inferences. Only minimal, non-guided prewriting activities were built into the assignments themselves to help students inductively derive a thesis.

For example, the NAEP Assessment asked subjects to read a poem or a short story and then immediately write a response to a relatively globally phrased question. The following is an example of a question used by the NAEP investigators:

> Read the poem below. Then write an essay about an important idea or theme of the poem. In your essay tell how such things as the images, events, sound and structure contribute to this idea or theme. We are interested in what you have to say, not your spelling or punctuation. Write your essay on the lines provided on the next two pages. You will have 9 minutes to read the poem and write your responses. (Education Commission of the States, 1981; p. 16)

This essay prompt does not include any prewriting practice. Therefore, the presentation of the task may not have provided students with adequate structure or direction that may have encouraged the use of supporting details, the absence of which was duly noted by the investigators. More specific essay directions, including prewriting activities, may have resulted in responses that had been more fully developed with supporting detail from the text. Yet despite the fact that the test format did not encourage or even allow for the use of heuristic strategies, the NAEP investigators concluded that students lack the heuristic strategies necessary for providing adequate support for their inferences. On the other hand, the NAEP task directions may have been deliberately formulated in order to determine how students would perform without additional assistance.

Instruction

However, the test format alone cannot be cited as the sole reason for students' apparent poor performance on interpretative tasks of literature. As was previously noted, both the NAEP and the IEA reports cite lack of instruction as a contributing factor to the absence of students' interpretive and analytic skills. While there are many claims that students are not able to perform instructional tasks that require critical thinking skills, students are still receiving very little instruction in the classroom that promotes higher levels of thinking (Barrell, 1984; Frederickson, 1984).

Many of the current instructional practices in the teaching of literature have been found to be inadequate with regard to critical response (Education Commission of the States, 1981; Purves, 1981). A recent review of instructional strategies for reading and responding to literary texts revealed that very few instructional techniques currently employed in classrooms actually facilitate the acquisition of critical thinking skills (Short, 1985). Perhaps explicit instruction of the heuristic strategies that are required for interpretive responses to literature would enable students to perform more creditably on those kinds of tasks.

The foregoing discussion raises two important questions. First, would heuristically-based essay prompts yield higher quality written responses to literature? Second, does heuristically-based instruction have an effect on student response to literature?

At present, there is a paucity of empirical research on these questions. Most of the research on the effects of heuristically-based assignments has occurred in composition research (Benton, Glover, & Plake, 1984; Hilgers, 1980; Hillocks, Kahn, & Johannessen, 1983). Students receiving "process-oriented" instruction through heuristically-based assignments produced writing judged to be of higher quality than did students who did not receive such instruction (Hillocks, 1986). These assignments helped students focus on the cognitive demands of a particular phase of the writing process (developing content, for example) without premature concern for organization. This alleviated students' difficulty in dealing simultaneously with both content and structure (Flower & Hayes, 1980).

Those studies that have explored the use of heuristically-based assignments in student response to literature indicate that assignments that specify necessary strategies on a step-by-step basis improve students' writing response performance (Hillocks, 1986; Marshall, 1984). In one recent study (Crabtree, 1985), college

students who completed prewriting activities involving listing of details, organizing information and inferring theses prior to writing an essay did significantly better on final essay ratings for degree of support and understanding than did students who only completed a series of questions about text prior to writing their essay. Reilly (1985) also found that both high school and college students who completed a guided prewriting activity wrote significantly higher quality interpretative responses to a short story than subjects who were given a more general topic as a prewriting assignment. Although these studies are promising, more research with high school age students needs to be done. While Crabtree (1985) found differences on final essay quality that were attributable to the differences in the stories the students read, neither of these studies examines differences in treatment effects due to difference in genre. This study will also determine whether a more guided, prewriting test format than that employed in the NAEP Assessment results in higher quality essays. It will directly compare the test format used by the NAEP investigators with a test format that includes specific prewriting activities that were lacking in the NAEP test. Because the results of the NAEP reports are widely used and frequently cited by educationists from all fields, it is important to determine if the method of testing itself may have influenced student performance.

Reading Ability

In addition to investigating the effects of test type and heuristic instruction on students' written responses to literature, this study also seeks to determine the main and interaction with treatment effects of reading ability on students' easay responses to literature. While it seems clear that students' reading ability would certainly influence their ability to move from literal levels of reading comprehension, the question of how reading ability influences written response to literature remains

unclear. Loque (1983) attributed all gains in writing ability on final essays to reading ability, gender, and attitude. Reilly (1985) found a significant but only moderate correlation between reading ability and overall quality of essays. Not only is the role of reading ability on students' written response to literature unclear, but it is important to investigate whether heuristically-based guided reading assignments have different degrees of effectiveness on students of differing reading ability. In other words, would poorer readers benefit more significantly from having a heuristic strategy that they might not be able to employ on their own? Or, would better readers show more significant gains because they are more able to adapt to the heuristic strategies required for an interpretive response to a literary work?

Genre

This study will also explore the specific qualities of genre type (poetry versus story) on literary response in both experimental and control conditions. Bruner (1986) claims that the strategies required for responding to a poem may be more cognitively demanding than those required for prose. Therefore, the response strategies that are appropriate to interpreting a poem may differ significantly from those required for interpreting a short story. Treatment effects (guided response format versus non-guided format) may also vary with genre.

Effects of Instruction

A separate but concurrently run experiment will examine the effects of a series of heuristically-based lessons on students' essay responses to a literary text. The lessons will focus on two aspects of response with which the final essay tasks are concerned: inferences about characters and statements about the feelings a literary text evokes. These lessons will guide students systematically through a series of strategies such as listing, jotting, and paraphrasing and serve to provide the

prewriting practice that has increasingly emerged as an effective means to improve students' written responses to literature (Crabtree, 1984; Hilgers, 1980; Reilly, 1985). The experiment will investigate whether instructional practice in specific types of prewriting exercises designed to facilitate the elaboration of responses with textual evidence can serve as a heuristic strategy for students when they are confronted with an essay task. Additionally, the experiment will also explore whether treatment effects (heuristically-based instruction versus non-heuristically-based instruction) varies with genre.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for the study were 213 eleventh and twelfth grade students from Apple Valley Senior High School in Apple Valley, Minnesota, which is a predominately white, middle to upper middle class suburb of Minneapolis/St. Paul. They were selected from the classes of four teachers, each with at least 10 years of teaching experience. The subjects were enrolled in four different language arts elective semester courses open to eleventh and twelfth graders.

Materials

Materials for the study included two short stories, two poems, four essay tests (two experimental and two control) to be taken during Session 1, four essay tests (two experimental and two control) to be taken during Session 2, and five heuristically-based lessons for use in Experiment 2. The design of the study is presented in Table 1.

Assignment of Classes to Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 and to Experimental and Control Groups

The four participating teachers drew lots to determine whether they would participate in Experiment 1 (test effect) or Experiment 2 (instructional effect).

Two teachers were assigned to Experiment 1 and two to Experiment 2. Each teacher agreed to employ two out of his/her five classes in the experiment and selected those two classes that were different sections of an identical course.

Within each experiment, intact classes were arbitrarily assigned by the investigator to be either experimental or control.

Training of Teachers

The four teachers participating in Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 were given three one-hour training sessions. The two teachers participating in Experiment 2 had an additional training session on the use of the five heuristic lessons. The purpose of each lesson was clarified and suggestions were made as to how to best fit the lessons into each teacher's curricula. In addition, the investigator taught a sample instructional lesson for each teacher in one of his/her classes that was not participating in the study.

Procedure

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was designed to examine the effect of test type (heuristic vs. NAEP) on the judged quality of student performance on essay questions. Two teachers, each with 12 years of teaching experience, participated in the study. Each teacher had both a control and an experimental class to control for teacher effect.

Students in both treatment conditions (experimental vs. control) participated in two separate sessions of test-taking, Session 1 and Session 2. Each session consisted of two tests, one on a poem and one on a short story. The poem and short story for Session 1 were those works that had been employed in the NAEP Assessment ("Story of a Good Dog" and "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes).

For both Sessions 1 and 2, the treatment group received heuristically-based exams with prewriting activities designed to prepare students for the final essay. These activities included strategies such as listing specific character traits, rereading certain passages, paraphrasing certain textual citations, and describing feelings evoked by particular lines in the text. The final essay questions themselves were identical to those used in the NAEP Assessment.

The control group received the identical essay questions as they were presented in the NAEP Assessment, without any heuristic prewriting activity.

There was a six-week interval between the two testing sessions. Teachers provided the same instruction for both the experimental and control test type groups. Their instruction consisted of traditional reading and discussion activities as prescribed by the curricula for each course.

The format of the Session 2 tests was identical to that of the Session 1 tests, except that the texts used had not been used in the NAEP Assessment. The purpose for conducting a second session was to determine if differences in effects of test format would occur only for the texts used in the NAEP Assessment or for other literary texts as well. Moreover, in order to determine genre effects, using more than one text representative of a particular genre would enhance the reliability of any genre effects that might be found.

For these Session 2 tests, a short story ("The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" by James Thurber) and a poem ("Grandmother" by Margaret Hasse) were used. As with the Session 1 test, students in the experimental group received a heuristically constructed test that employed the prewriting strategies described above, while those in the control group received the same essay questions without heuristic prewriting.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 was designed to test the effects of a series of heuristically-based assignments on the quality of written responses to the NAEP essay questions. Two teachers participated in the study. Again, each teacher had an experimental and a control group. The pre- and post-tests used in Experiment 2 were identical to those used in Session 1 and Session 2 in the first study.

The treatment in this experiment was a series of five heuristically-based assignments (lessons) on character traits and feelings. All students in both treatment conditions received as a pretest the two NAEP format tests that had been used with the control group of Experiment 1 for Session 1. Over the next 10 weeks, the experimental group received the five heuristically-based lessons at approximately two-week intervals, while the control group received the usual instruction the teachers had planned. At the end of 10 weeks, students in both treatment conditions received as posttests the two NAEP format tests that had been used with the control group of Experiment 1 for Session 2.

Coding the Data

Four judges were engaged to rate the quality of the essay responses for both experiments. A four-point analytic rating scale was used to evaluate the papers. The criteria employed included the following: 1) clear statement of thesis, 2) reliance on text for support, 3) degree of elaboration of support, 4) understanding of the text, 5) overall quality.

These particular criteria were employed in order to determine students' ability to cite specific evidence in support of a thesis, a central focus of the primary trait scoring employed in the NAEP Assessment. In order to generate interval data appropriate for the statistical analysis employed in this study, rating scales rather than primary trait scoring was employed.

Each of the criterion consisted of a four-point scale: 1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = excellent.

All student papers from all conditions were coded by the investigator as either Experiment 1 or Experiment 2, Session 1 or Session 2, but the judges were not aware of these codings. The papers were then shuffled together and each judge received a packet of essays that included papers from all conditions--both experiments and experimental and control conditions within each experiment. Again, the judges were unaware of the specific classification of each paper. Because of the voluminous number of essays generated by the study (each subject wrote four essays), four judges were engaged to rate the papers. After each judge rated her entire packet, the packet was exchanged with one other judge so that each paper would be read twice. With the exception of the training sessions described above, no judge ever saw the rating sheets of another judge.

For purposes of analysis, each student's set of scores from both raters was recorded, resulting in eight sets of scores (two for each Session 1 test and two for each Session 2 test) per student. Students with incomplete sets of scores were omitted from subsequent analysis.

Results

Mean Quality Ratings for Essays

Experiment 1. Table 2 presents mean essay scores for each of the four essay tests. It shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and numbers of students. A 2 X 3 design is employed: treatment (experimental test and NAEP test) by three reading levels (low, medium, high).

Experiment 2. Table 3 presents the mean essay scores for each of the four essay tests. It shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and number of students. A

2 X 3 design is employed: treatment (heuristic versus non-heuristic instruction) by three reading levels (low, medium, high).

Results of Experiment 1

Effect of test type on the judged quality of written response to a literary text. To test the effect of test type, a multivariate analysis of variance was run using test type (heuristic format versus NAEP format) and reading group (low, medium, high) as between-subject factors. As can be seen in Table 4, there were no treatment or treatment by reading interaction effects.

Because each of the dependent variables in Experiment 1 can be considered a distinct and separate measure (no pre-post test relationships), univariate analyses of variance were run for each of the four test measures. As can be seen in Table 5, these analyses revealed that treatment did have a significant effect on the scores of the experimental group for the Session 2 poem "Grandmother" (F [df 1,70] = 6.3, $p < .01$). The students who received the guided test format had a significantly higher mean score (M = 12.7) than the students who received the NAEP test format (M = 11.0).

Effect of genre type on the judged quality of written response to a literary text. To test the effect of genre type, it was included in the above analyses as a within-subjects factor. Additionally, overall genre effect and genre by test type interaction was determined. As can be seen in Table 4, genre had a significant effect on students' performance on the written essay tasks (F [1,70] = 18.83, $p < .001$). The results indicate that in both treatment conditions, students performed significantly better on the essay tests for stories (overall M = 14.5) than they did for poems (overall M = 13.2). There were no significant genre by treatment or genre by reading ability interaction effects.

Effect of reading ability on judged quality of written response to a literary work. Reading ability was included as a blocking factor in the above analyses. Overall

reading and reading ability by treatment interaction effects were examined. As can be seen in Table 4, there was a significant overall effect of reading ability (F [2,70] = 5.75, p = .005). However, there was no significant reading ability by treatment interaction.

Follow-up contrasts found the high reading ability group (M = 14.0) scoring better than the low (M = 12.0) and medium (M = 13.1) groups, (T [df, 70] = 2.37, p = .02). The medium group outscores the low, (T [df, 70] = 2.02, p = .05).

Results of Experiment 2

To determine the results of Experiment 2, a multivariate analysis of covariance was run, including treatment as a between-subject factor, reading ability as a blocking factor and genre as a within-subject factor. Dependent variables were the scores on the two posttests (Poem 2 and Story 2). In this analysis, scores on the two pretests (Poem 1 and Story 1) were used as covariates. These results are presented in Table 6.

Effect of heuristic instruction on the judged quality of written response to a literary text. To test the effect of heuristic instruction, a multivariate analysis of covariance was run using type of instruction (heuristic versus non-heuristic) and reading ability group (low, medium, high) as between-subject factors.

As can be seen from Table 6, there was no significant treatment effect, after removing any covariate effects that may have been present. Additionally, there appeared to be no significant relationship between the pretest and the posttest measures.

Effect of genre type on the judged quality of written response to a literary text. Genre type was included in the above analyses as a within-subjects factor. Additionally, overall genre effect and genre by test type of instruction interaction were determined. As can be seen in Table 6, after removing any initial genre effects, there were no additional remaining genre effects in the posttest. That is, any genre

effects that remained in the posttests were attributable to those differences that existed before treatment, rather than being produced by the treatment itself.

After adjusting posttest scores to initial differences in pretest scores, there remained a significant treatment by genre interaction (F [1,46] = 6.35, p = .02). This significant interaction indicates that there was a larger genre effect in the experimental group than there was in the control group. Although in both groups, means for the tests on stories (overall story M = 15.4) were larger than those for means on the tests for poems (overall poem M = 14.2), the magnitude of that difference was greater in the experimental group than it was in the control group. To further determine the specific direction of this treatment by genre interaction, follow-up examinations of the analyses were conducted. A close scrutiny of the data revealed that while the control group (M = 13.6) performed better than did the experimental group (M = 13.1) on the posttest for the poem, the experimental group (M = 16.8) performed better than did the control group (M = 14.2) on the posttest for the story.

There was no significant genre by reading ability group interaction.

Effect of reading ability on judged quality of written response to a literary text. Reading ability was included as a blocking factor in the above analyses. Overall reading ability and reading ability by treatment interaction effects were examined. As can be seen in Table 6, there was a significant overall effect of reading ability (F [2,26] = 4.4, p = .02). However, there was no significant reading ability by treatment interaction. Follow-up contrasts determined differences between the high reading ability group (M = 15.6) and the medium (M = 14.1) and the low (M = 13.2) ability groups (T [df 1,46] = 2.92, p = .005). There were no significant differences between the low and medium ability groups.

Discussion

Although the general lack of significant results of either treatment precludes the drawing of many definitive conclusions, there are some comments that can be made on the findings of this study. These comments will be presented according to the four considerations of the effects of heuristically-based assignments on adolescent response to literature upon which the study focused: 1) the effects of test type, 2) the effects of instruction, 3) the effects of reading ability, and 4) the effects of genre.

The Effects of Test Type

This element of the study was prompted, as has been previously mentioned, by the disheartening results of the 1981 Reading and Literature Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. This study attempted to investigate whether the lack of evidence of reflective, analytic thought in the student essays collected by the NAEP investigators was at least partially attributable to the test format used to elicit those essays: the reading of a literary text with no prereading or prewriting activities followed by essay questions with no adjunct guided questions. This study attempted to investigate whether the lack of well-structured analytic essay responses was more a function of the test format than it was of students' abilities to respond critically to a literary text.

The experimental test employed in this study, a guided assignment designed specifically to facilitate the composition for elaborated essay responses, failed to elicit superior essay responses for three of the four texts employed in the study, including the two texts that had been used originally in the NAEP Assessment. Thus, while one cannot conclude with certainty that the test format used by the NAEP investigators was not a factor in the students' poor essay performances, one is also

unable to conclude from the results of this study that a different test format might improve student performance on essays, or that guided prewriting improves written interpretation of literature.

That the students who received the experimental test did not, in three of the four measures, perform better than the students in the control group may be attributed to several factors:

1. Students may need to be trained in heuristic strategies before they can benefit from them in a test situation. It may not be possible for a newly introduced strategy to help students with a cognitive task unless students already know how to use that strategy. Specifying a series of unfamiliar strategies may, in fact, have produced a kind of cognitive overload that confused rather than aided the students who received the experimental test.

2. Students who received the experimental test format may have had less time to compose their essay responses than those students in the control group who recieved the NAEP format test. In order to control for differences in the amount of time devoted to reading and writing about a text, students in both treatment conditions were given the same amount of time to read the literary texts and compose their essay responses. However, given the additional time students in the experimental group may have taken to complete the guided assignment, the control group may have had more time to complete the essay. Yet students who received the experimental test had far more writing to do because of the guided prewriting activities.

3. The questions used in the guided prewriting for the experimental test may not have contributed directly to the facilitation of superior written response to literature as called for by the essay questions employed. That is, despite the investigator's best effort to construct prewriting activities that directly aided the development of written responses to the specific essay questions used in the text,

the activities might not have tapped the kinds of prior knowledge and reader responses that needed to be facilitated.

Despite these considerations, there was, however, a significant treatment effect on one of the test measures. Students who received the experimental test with guided prewriting wrote significantly better essay responses for the poem "Grandmother" than students who received the NAEP test format. This finding is especially interesting in light of the fact that the students in the experimental group of Experiment 2, who received heuristic instruction but received the NAEP format test, did not even perform as well as did the control group on this poem. These results would indicate that in the case of the poem "Grandmother," the use of guided prewriting activities did make a difference on the quality of essay responses.

One explanation for this result may lie in the nature of the work itself and the specific qualities of the guided prewriting activity that accompanied it. "Grandmother" is a highly emotional and evocative poem, a moving account of the death of a grandparent. The guided response activities that accompanied the poem focuses on the feelings the poem evokes in a pointed and specific way. For example, students were asked to describe how they felt when they read a line about "blue carnations in her casket." This might have evoked a strong emotional response in students because they were asked to recreate an image of a grandmother lying in a casket strewn with flowers. Since the final essay question asked students to describe their feelings about the poem, the guided questions may have better prepared them for the task.

Additionally, students might have had greater familiarity with the topic of the poem, especially when compared with the topics of the other literary texts employed; for example, the advice of a poor black woman to her son in the case of "Mother to Son" and the fantasies of a middle-aged man in the case of "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" may be unfamiliar to white middle class adolescents. It may be that the

specific questions included in the guided prewriting, the subject of the poem, and perhaps the students' greater familiarity with the topic provided the appropriate combination for the effectiveness of the experimental test format.

The Effect of Instruction in Heuristic Strategies

In the foregoing discussion on the effect of test type, the speculation arose that students may need training in heuristic strategies in order to be able to employ them effectively. This possibility has also been raised by cognitive psychologists who have investigated the use of heuristic strategies (Glaser, 1976). Experiment 2 was designed to investigate the effectiveness of training in heuristic procedures on the quality of students' essay responses to literary texts.

The results of this study fail to demonstrate that a series of heuristically-based lessons would help students develop superior written responses to literature. The heuristic instruction may not have improved the quality of the essays for methodological reasons rather than conceptual ones. In other words, it remains a highly tenable proposition that training in heuristic procedures may result in superior performance on specified learning tasks, but specific elements in the design and execution of this particular study may have contributed to the lack of significant results of the heuristic treatment. Among the factors that may have contributed to the failure to obtain results are the following:

1. Students may simply not have received enough training in heuristic procedures. When one considers the claim of many educational observers that students receive very little opportunity to apply analytic skills (Applebee, 1984; Frederickson, 1984; Purves, 1981), it becomes clear that a series of five lessons may be able to do very little to compensate for this lack. Perhaps more lessons over a longer period of time would have yielded stronger results.

2. There may not have been a clear enough connection, for the students at least, between the lessons and the writing tasks. Students may not have had enough cues to apply the heuristic strategies presented in the lessons to the essay questions. Although the lessons were designed to complement the questions (they focused on inferences about characters and feelings about a text), this connection may not have been explicit enough for students to facilitate transfer between the lessons and the final essays.

3. Related to the preceding point is the fact that students in both treatment conditions of Experiment 2 received the NAEP format tests rather than the heuristically-based tests. This was incorporated into the original design of the study to control for test effect; any evidence of superior performance in the experimental group could then be more easily attributable to treatment of instruction. However, if both groups had received the heuristically-based test format, it may have reinforced and activated the heuristic instruction the experimental group received.

4. The correlations among the four test measures ranged from a low of .02 between the two poem tests to a high of .33 between Poem 1 and Story 2. These low correlations may be due to the fact that different texts were used for each of the four tests. Another possible explanation for the low correlations is the essentially open-ended nature of the test measures. The lack of correlation between the test measures may have precluded the discovery of true gain scores from pre- to post-test measures. In other words, students may have improved in the skills the heuristic lessons attempted to address, but the posttest measures may have failed to capture that improvement.

5. The specific qualities of the four literary texts employed in the study may have contributed to the lack of significant treatment effects. It is difficult to assess the relative difficulty of literary texts, especially when the learning task

involves interpretation, rather than just literal comprehension. The lower mean scores of all students for the second poem and story raises the possibility that these texts may have been more difficult than the ones used for the pretest. This may have been especially true in the case of the second story, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Because the story is concerned with fantasy and daydreaming, it placed greater demands on students for the "willing suspension of disbelief" that some students seem unable or unwilling to do (Jacobsen, 1982).

Reading Ability

It is not, of course, surprising to discover that in both Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 better readers performed significantly better on the written response tasks. Recent research on the connection between reading and writing skills suggests that better readers are better writers than their peers and vice versa because they are more reflective in their engagements with written language than their less proficient peers (Birnbaum, 1986). Jones (1985) points out that post-reading activities, such as written interpretation of a text, are clearly dependent on the degree to which the reader engaged in such processes as pausing for reflection, skimming backward to verify something, re-reading and rethinking. Better readers are more likely to engage in these cognitive processes while reading than are poorer readers.

Similarly, Pearson and Tierney (1984) claim that better readers are more able to compose a meaning for the text and determine the author's goals and intentions. Better readers plan their reading of a text and align themselves in position with respect to the text and the author. Thus, after reading, they are better prepared to answer interpretive questions because they have read the text with their thoughts inclined toward interpretative possibilities. Investigators in both reading and

composition research have independently linked reflective behavior or metacognitive awareness and control to skilled reading and writing. To facilitate the development of reflective thinking, Birnbaum recommends the application of precisely the type of instruction this study attempted to provide: "heuristics that teach how to ask appropriate questions concerning the topic" (Birnbaum, 1986; p. 43).

The lack of any treatment by reading interaction gives no evidence that the heuristic instruction worked differently with any one of the three reading ability levels. While it would be tempting to suggest that this lack of interaction effect might indicate equal effectiveness of heuristic strategies with high, medium, and low ability readers, the general lack of significant treatment effects in either study suggests that the strategies may have been equally ineffective, regardless of reading ability.

Effect of Genre

The results of this study indicate that genre (story versus poem) had a significant effect on the overall quality of students' written response to literature. In both experiments, students in the experimental groups as well as students in the control groups performed significantly better on the essay tests for short stories than they did on the essay tests for poems.

Zaharias (1986) has suggested that because most previous studies of response to literature have been limited to an investigation of response to a literary work representative of only one genre, "relatively little is known about the manner in which genre influences response" (p. 64). The studies that do discuss the influence of genre upon response (Corcoran, 1979; Cornaby, 1975; Zaharias, 1986) have examined how genre influences a reader's preference for a particular response type (describing versus interpreting, for example) rather than the relative difficulties a reader may

encounter with a particular genre. The results of this study indicate that for this sample of students and the four literary texts used to elicit response, students of all ability levels in all treatment conditions had more difficulty composing a written response to a poem than they did to a story.

One explanation may be that the structural properties of the poem may interfere with comprehension and subsequently the ability to compose a response to a work that the reader does not understand very well. While there has been some research on the relationship between textual properties and comprehension, most of the work has focused on narratives rather than poetry.

The students may also have had more difficulty with the poetry than they did with the stories because of comparative lack of experience and instruction with the genre. Observational studies of literature instruction reveal that students are given more opportunities to respond to stories than they are to poems, perhaps because poems are generally considered to be harder to teach (Travers, 1984). When poems are taught, they are frequently, as Rosenblatt (1985) points out, used merely as a medium for studying versification and figurative language devices rather than as a catalyst for a personal aesthetic response.

It is also important to note the genre by treatment interaction that was present in Experiment 2. This interaction seems to indicate that a series of heuristically-based lessons had a different effect on students' written responses for stories than it did on students' written responses for poems. The genre by treatment interaction manifested itself in the following way: students in both experimental and control conditions scored higher on the story pretest than they did on the poem pretest; however, on the posttests, students in the control condition performed better on the poem posttest while students in the experimental group performed better on the story posttest.

It is difficult to determine the exact nature of this differential effect; it is not known, for example, if the series of heuristically-based assignments worked better for stories or for poems. What is indicated, however, is that the application of these kinds of instructional strategies may differ according to genre, an important consideration for both the construction and implementation of heuristic strategies for teaching literature.

Suggestions for Further Research

The questions examined in this study are important ones for those concerned with facilitating adolescent response to literature and improving reflective thinking as manifested in students' written essay responses to literature. It is possible that heuristic strategies may indeed effectively facilitate critical thinking and superior essay responses to literature; further research needs to be conducted to investigate this claim. This research could proceed in several directions.

First, further research should examine different methods for facilitating and assessing written interpretations of literary texts. Little is known about the specific aspects of test format and essay prompts that are most effective for interpretive essay tasks. Marshall (1984), for example, suggests that open-ended assignments result in better quality essays than do assignments that involve answering a series of short-answer questions.

Second, there is a need for longitudinal studies that investigate the effect of extended instruction in heuristic procedures on adolescent response to literature. This research might be conducted in the form of experimental curricula that are heuristically-based.

Third, more reliable measures to assess the quality of students' written response to literature need to be developed. The nature of the response to literature is

subjective and multifaceted, making it difficult to capture with reliable assessment instruments. Subsequent investigations should focus on the development of pre- and post-test measures that truly assess a specified response task.

Fourth, further investigation should be made into the definitive relationship between reading ability and written response tasks. Specifically, research should be conducted to discern if instruction in heuristic procedures and guided prewriting for essay tests have different effects on students of different ability levels. This research might supply answers to inquiries about how heuristic strategies can better serve poor readers as well as questions concerning the type of instruction that further facilitates the development of written responses for more able students.

Finally, the results of this study suggest the need for more exploration into the role genre plays in response to literature. Comparative studies that employ more than one type of genre may provide useful insight into the instructional strategies that are most appropriate for each genre. Additionally, further investigation into the structural properties of poetry that may influence response may provide insight on the kinds of instruction that would enable students to develop more elaborated responses to poetry.

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Table 1. Design of the Study

Experiment	Test 1	Treatment	Test 2
STUDY 1			
Experimental	Mother to Son (poem)	Heuristically-based Tests	Grandmother (poem)
	Story of a Good Dog (story)	No instructional Intervention	Secret Life of Walter Mitty (story)
	Heuristic		Heuristic
Control	Mother to Son (poem) NAEP Format	NAEP Format Tests	Grandmother (poem) NAEP Format
	Story of a Good Dog NAEP Format	No instructional Intervention	Secret Life of Walter Mitty NAEP Format
STUDY 2		Instruction	
Experimental	Mother to Son (poem) NAEP Format	Heuristically-based Lessons (5)	Grandmother (poem) NAEP Format
	Story of a Good Dog	NAEP Tests	Secret Life of Walter Mitty
Control	Mother to Son (poem) NAEP Format	No Heuristically-based Lessons	Grandmother (poem) NAEP Format
	Story of a Good Dog	NAEP Tests	Secret Life of Walter Mitty NAEP Format

Table 2. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Four Test Measures and Three Reading Achievement Levels: Experiment 1

Test	Treatment	Reading Ability	Mean	SD	N
1. "Mother to Son" (Session 1 poem)	Experimental	Overall	12.4	2.9	39
		Low	12.1	3.2	16
		Middle	13.5	3.5	6
		High	12.3	2.5	17
	Control	Overall	13.4	2.9	37
		Low	12.4	2.5	12
		Middle	13.8	3.6	13
		High	14.1	2.3	12
2. "Story of a Good Dog" (Session 1 story)	Experimental	Overall	14.7	2.8	39
		Low	14.3	3.2	16
		Middle	15.5	2.2	6
		High	14.9	2.6	17
	Control	Overall	14.8	3.5	37
		Low	12.8	3.6	12
		Middle	15.5	3.0	13
		High	16.1	3.2	12
3. "Grandmother" (Session 2 poem)	Experimental	Overall	12.7	3.2	39
		Low	11.0	3.2	16
		Middle	13.0	2.1	6
		High	14.1	2.8	17
	Control	Overall	11.0	3.1	37
		Low	10.3	2.7	12
		Middle	10.0	2.7	13
		High	12.7	3.4	12
4. "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (Session 2 story)	Experimental	Overall	12.7	3.2	39
		Low	12.4	3.0	16
		Middle	13.3	2.6	6
		High	12.8	3.7	17
	Control	Overall	12.2	3.3	37
		Low	10.9	3.5	12
		Middle	12.0	3.8	13
		High	13.8	1.9	12

Table 3. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Four Test Measures and Three Reading Achievement Levels: Experiment 2

Test	Treatment	Reading Ability		SD	N
1. "Mother to Son" (Pretest poem)	Experimental	Overall	17.3	2.4	18
		Low	16.1	3.2	4
		Middle	18.0	1.3	7
		High	17.1	2.8	7
	Control	Overall	13.9	3.3	35
		Low	12.6	3.5	12
		Middle	14.2	3.2	14
		High	15.1	3.0	9
2. "Story of a Good Dog" (Pretest story)	Experimental	Overall	17.3	3.4	18
		Low	19.2	.96	4
		Middle	16.8	5.0	7
		High	16.7	2.0	7
	Control	Overall	14.8	2.8	35
		Low	14.2	2.6	12
		Middle	14.7	2.9	14
		High	15.7	3.2	9
3. "Grandmother" (Posttest poem)	Experimental	Overall	13.1	2.9	18
		Low	13.1	2.5	4
		Middle	12.7	2.4	7
		High	13.6	4.0	7
	Control	Overall	13.6	2.3	35
		Low	13.2	1.7	12
		Middle	12.3	1.8	14
		High	15.7	2.7	9
4. "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" (Posttest story)	Experimental	Overall	16.8	2.9	18
		Low	13.5	.408	4
		Middle	17.2	2.5	7
		High	18.1	2.6	7
	Control	Overall	14.2	2.4	35
		Low	13.6	3.1	12
		Middle	14.2	2.8	14
		High	15.0	1.9	9

Table 4. Effects of Treatment, Reading Ability, and Genre on Mean Ratings of Essays: Experiment 1

Source of Variation	MS	df	F	p
Between Subjects				
Treatment	13.9	1	.80	.37
Reading Group	99.4	2	5.76	.005
Treatment by Reading Group	19.6	2	1.13	.33
Error	17.3	70		
Within Subjects				
Genre	98.3	1	18.83	<.001
Treatment and Genre	.3	1	.06	.80
Reading Group and Genre	1.3	2	.25	.78
Treatment by Reading Group and Genre	10.6	2	2.03	.14
Error	5.2	70		

Table 5. Effect of Treatment on Each of the Four Texts

Text	MS (treatment)	MS (error)	F (1,70)	p
"Mother to Son"	9.49	8.66	1.09	.29
"Story of a Good Dog"	.30	9.43	.03	.86
"Grandmother"	54.46	8.62	6.31	.01*
"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"	6.79	10.41	.65	.42

Table 6. Effects of Treatment, Reading Ability and Genre on Mean Quality Ratings for Posttest Essays

Source of Variation	MS	df	F	p
Between Subjects				
Covariates[a]	.52	1	.07	.80
Treatment	5.56	1	.72	.40
Reading Group	33.97	2	4.39	.02
Treatment by Reading Group	5.94	2	.77	.47
Error	7.73	46		
Within Subjects				
Covariate and Genre[b]	.01	1	.01	.98
Genre	2.83	1	.55	.46
Treatment and Genre	32.58	1	6.35	.02
Reading Group and Genre	13.40	2	2.61	.08
Treatment by Reading Group and Genre	11.25	2	2.19	.12
Error	5.13	46		

[a]Represents the pooled overall pretest poem and pretest story effects.

[b]Represents the pooled initial genre difference between the pretest poem and pretest story.

Name _____

Section Number _____

SAMPLE NAEP TEST

Essay Questions: "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"

Please read the story, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

Then, answer the following essay questions; spend the rest of the class period answering the questions. There are no correct answers to these questions.

Please write your answers on the lined paper the teacher gives you. Put your name on the first sheet. Put the number of the question from this sheet with your answers on the lined papers.

1. **What emotions and feelings did you have when you read this story? Describe your feelings in a few words on the lined paper.**

2. **What was it about the story that made you feel the way you did? Write your answer on the lined paper.**

3. **How would you describe Walter Mitty? Describe him in a few words on the lined paper.**

4. **What was it about the story that led you to describe Walter the way you did in Question 3? Write your answer on the lined paper.**

Name _____

Section Number _____

SAMPLE EXPERIMENTAL TEST

Essay Questions: "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"

Please read the story, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

You will be writing some answers to some essay questions on your feelings about the story and how you would describe him. You will also be answering some shorter questions that will help you answer the essay questions; if you don't finish today, you can finish during tomorrow's class.

After you finish the story:

I. When you first began reading, you probably thought this was a war story. How did you feel when you discovered it was one of Walter Mitty's daydreams?

Feelings:

II. A. List below some of the other things that Walter Mitty imagines himself doing.

1.
2.
3.
4.

B. Which of these did you like best?

III. How did you feel about Mitty when you read the fantasies listed in II?

IV. Describe how you felt when you read the part about:

1. The cop and the parking lot attendant yelling at Mitty:

2. Mitty wandering around, trying to remember what his wife wanted him to buy:

3. Mrs. Mitty saying she needed to take Walter's temperature:

V. Reread the very last paragraph of the story. Then list some words that describe how you felt about Mitty at the end of the story.

1.
2.
3.
4.

VI. Now, based on your answers to I, II, III, and IV, answer the following questions on the lined paper. Put your name on the paper and the numbers 1 and 2 at the beginning of your answers:

1. What emotions and feelings did you have when you read this story? Describe your feelings in a few words on the lined paper.

2. What was it about the story that made you feel the way you did? Write your answer on the lined paper.

VII. Go back to Question II, your list of Walter's daydreams. Besides daydreaming, what else does he do in the story? List Walter's other actions.

1.
2.
3.
4.

VIII. What word(s) would Mrs. Mitty use to describe Walter?

_____

_____

Why?

IX. List at least four descriptive words that come to mind when you think of Walter Mitty.

X. Now, based on your answers to II, V, VII, VIII, and IX, answer the following questions on the lined paper. Put the numbers 3 and 4 at the beginning of your answers:

3. How would you describe Walter Mitty? Describe him in a few words on the lined paper.

4. What was it about the story that led you to describe him the way you did? Write your answer on the lined paper.

SAMPLE LESSON

Transporting Characters

1. Jot down the names of two characters from the text you are currently reading.

   Character A:_____

   Character B:_____

2. Based on the type of lists you made for lessons 1 and 2, list five specific things about each character. (If you are working with the same characters you did before, this will just be a quick review.)

Character A	Character B
appearance/clothes	
1.	1.
interests/skills/knowledge	
2.	2.
typical behaviors	
3.	3.
ways of talking/communicating	
4.	4.
feelings/thoughts/beliefs	
5.	5.

3. Your teacher will now ask you to work with one or more students for the remainder of the period. Once you are in your group, briefly compare your lists for each character. Using those lists, write as a group, one descriptive statement about each character. This statement should include several traits that were suggested by your lists. For example, if several people in your group listed Character A as being quiet around other people, you might include the word "shy" in your descriptive statement.

Descriptive Statements

Character A

Character B

4. You have come to know these two characters in the particular setting and situation of the text. You will now be asked to imagine how the characters would behave in a different time and space. Below are four make-believe situations. Based on your understanding of the characters, try to figure out how they would behave in each set of circumstances. Use your imagination and send these characters into your own world. Work as a group and brainstorm before you make your final decisions. BE PREPARED TO EXPLAIN YOUR STORIES BY USING THE CHARACTER TRAITS AND DESCRIPTIONS YOU WORKED ON EARLIER.

   A. Situation 1

      Characters A and B are driving down a fairly deserted stretch of highway in below-zero temperature. They are running late for an appointment. They spot a stalled car on the shoulder of the road, with a lone driver who looks panic-stricken.

      1. Will Character A want to stop and help?

         Why or why not?

      2. Will Character B want to stop and help?

         Why or why not?

      3. Create some dialogue that might occur as the two characters discuss the situation.

         A:

         B:

         A:

         B:

   B. Situation 2

      Characters A and B are on a canoe trip in the BWCA. Unfortunately, they paddle too close to some rapids and their canoe capsizes. Assume they are both average swimmers.

      1. Would Character A be level-headed in this crisis situation or would s/he panic?

      2. What about Character B?

3. In terms of your chances for survival, who would you rather have in a canoe with you in a similar situation?

   Why?

C. Situation 3

Characters A and B have miraculously appeared at Apple Valley High School. Your teacher is delighted at the opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the text. She/he brings them to the teachers' lounge and, among other things, shows them the final test on the text for their approval. Upon leaving, each character is approached by a typical AVHS student who offers an attractive sum of money for a copy of the test.

1. What will Character A want to do?

   Why?

2. What will Character B want to do?

   Why?

3. Again, create some dialogue that might occur between the two characters in this particular situation.

   A:

   B:

   A:

   B:

4. What do you think would end up happening?